

THE *TESTIMONIA* REGARDING EURIPIDES

BY

SYLVESTER BYRON STRAW

A.B., Wheaton College, 1937

A.M., University of Illinois, 1938

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
CLASSICS IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1941

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A study of the *testimonia* regarding the life of Euripides is important for a proper understanding of Greek and Roman biographical method, since they afford excellent illustrations of the not uncommon practice of drawing inferences from all varieties of information, and then occasionally dressing up these inferences in the vivid form of anecdotes. Every student of the biography of Euripides is aware of the many aspersions cast upon that poet by Aristophanes in almost every one of his plays, but particularly in the *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and *Frogs*, and of the results of such raillery upon succeeding writers.

But the Old Comedy was in no sense the only source of many erroneous statements about Euripides. The tragic poet's own works abound in contemporary allusions, and indeed were expected by later scholars and scholiasts to contain such allusions (see *schol. Hec.* 254). Euripides was probably never surpassed in antiquity in open-mindedness and alertness to every important question, social, political, and philosophical, in his time; and it is perfectly natural that he should have given expression to his own judgments about them. Another fruitful source for misinformation about Euripides is the large number of passages in his dramas which either certainly were, or else might very well have been, spoken "in character." These have been responsible for recorded anecdotes which are either intrinsically implausible, or else contradictory to well-authenticated data.

The amount of biographical data about Euripides is both considerable and as yet not all collected and arranged, and it is for these reasons, in large part, that the study was undertaken. My study intends to include all the data of antiquity and the Byzantine era, that bear in any way on the life of the poet (and ultimately on his *Nachleben*). The *testimonia* have been gathered from the most recent critical editions of the Greek

and Latin authors, and an *apparatus criticus* has been appended to the separate items where the variant readings seemed to be important. The data, for the most part, are arranged chronologically and are grouped together according to subject at the beginning of each section of the study.

The topic for consideration was suggested to me by Dr. W. A. Oldfather, who some years ago assembled by far the greater part of the *testimonia*, and who for some thirty-five years has been systematically recording all newly found materials, and recent scholarly literature upon Euripides. To him I am especially indebted for making available to me his entire collections, and for assistance during the progress of the study.

I. Sources for the life. Besides the widely scattered bits of information on the pages of numerous Greek and Latin writers of all periods, there are preserved several highly important "Lives" of Euripides, four of which were written by well-known ancient authors, to wit Satyrus (of this but a very small percentage has been preserved in a satisfactory state), Gellius, Hesychius-Suidas, and Thomas Magister. The rest have been transmitted anonymously. These anonymous *Vitae*, five in number and appearing in manuscripts which date from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, cannot be regarded *in their present form* as any earlier than the other biographies (for each is no older than its own ms.) but presumably derive from the same archetypal *Vita*, or biographical collection, as do Gellius, Hesychius-Suidas, and Thomas Magister. The archetypal *Vita* appears to have been compiled and arranged from earlier biographical data late in the third or early in the second century B. C. Satyrus, while he drew from the same general fountains of learning as did the other biographies, lies distinctly to one side of the scholarly tradition. This graceful and sophisticated Peripatetic dialogue, because of its literary character, which shows that it was intended to reach a wide variety of readers, and not merely scholars alone, would scarcely have appealed to the learned grammarians, who lacked style, humor, and taste.

II. The name Euripides. This is derived from *euripus*,

which means simply "strait", and hence is quite as applicable to the one between Salamis and Attica as to any other anywhere in the world. Euripides was born around the time of the second Persian invasion, and on the island of Salamis. His name, accordingly, derives its immediate appropriateness from the *euripus* at Salamis, whatever might have been the case with men older than himself who had borne the same name, after the example of which no doubt the name was applied.

There is a certain element of intrinsic interest in observing the origin, dissemination, and history of a particular name. Quite a few other individuals in antiquity bore the name Euripides, and in several instances the records, although actually referring to the activities of some other man of the same or a very similar name, probably in time came to be associated with the name of the great poet. A discrimination of the data is, therefore, essential. *Testimonia* have been assembled concerning apparently seventeen separate men, besides the great poet, who bore the name Euripides (or a name so similar as readily to be confused with it), and they range in time from the late sixth century B. C. to about the middle of the second century A. D.

III. Year of birth, first play, and death. The traditional literary date, 480/79 B. C., has been defended for the date of birth, instead of that furnished by the *Marmor Parium*, 485/4 B. C.

The year 455 B. C. given by the *Vitae* as the date of the poet's first play constitutes very likely the oldest authentic reference to Euripides, since presumably it derives from the didascalical lists of Aristotle.

The record of Timaeus, Eratosthenes, and Apollodorus, who place the death of Euripides in 406/5 B. C., has been rejected in favor of the seemingly more trustworthy date in the *Marmor Parium*, 407/6 B. C. Euripides, according to the most plausible accounts, seems to have died in the spring of 406 B. C.

IV. Place of birth. Besides the express statements to the effect that Euripides was born on Salamis, we have the additional information that he was called a "Salaminian" (IG,

14, 1207), and that he possessed a cave on Salamis, which in his time was likely to have been inherited family property.

V. The family of Euripides and its social position. Although the poet was born on Salamis, his parents seem to have owned quite an extensive estate at Phlya, which yielded a sufficient abundance of produce to assure the family a comfortable living. The jests about Clito as a "greengrocer" are, accordingly, mere comic exaggerations. Evidence that the family belonged to the well-to-do upper class is afforded by the records, (1) that Euripides in his early life took part in several liturgical services, which were restricted in practice to the wealthier Athenians; (2) that he possessed a library of conspicuous size for his time; (3) that he was once honored with *proxenia* and *atelia* in Magnesia; and (4) that he was party to a suit of *antidosis*. Besides these unimpeachable records we have the express statement of Philochorus, an exceedingly competent antiquarian, that the family belonged to the upper class.

VI. Early pursuits, athletics and painting. There can be no reasonable doubt that Euripides in his boyhood engaged in athletics. He was refused entrance at Olympia in boxing, because of *ambigua aetas*, but he won later at Athens in both the pancratium and boxing, and was crowned at Eleusis for one of these events, presumably boxing.

Tradition states that in his youth Euripides did some painting. Such would have been the perfectly natural pastime of this poet whose sensitive spirit was alert to the most varied interests, athletics, philosophy, social questions, and politics. Besides Euripides describes and alludes to many more *objets d'art* than do his great predecessors in drama. This quite extraordinary amount of attention to the decorative and plastic arts is altogether in keeping with the tradition regarding his own activities as a painter, and strongly confirms it.

VII. Euripides and the philosophers. Although Euripides was one of the great original thinkers of all time, he seems nevertheless to have been influenced markedly by several of his contemporaries. Perhaps he was more nearly an actual pupil of Anaxagoras than of any other philosopher, for he gives ex-

pression to the cosmological theories of Anaxagoras, and even seems to allude to him personally, in a way that would indicate intimate friendship. From Archelaus he occasionally borrowed a more materialistic explanation of the generation of the universe, but always, within the requirements of the best poetry, toning down the more abstract theories of the philosophers and intermingling them with mythology. Euripides seems to have known Protagoras well and to have felt keenly about the misfortunes of that philosopher, even borrowing some of his teachings. Although the ethical principles of Socrates about the cause of evil and the teaching of virtue would have disarmed tragedy of one of its strongest weapons, the conflict of emotions, Euripides undoubtedly knew and profoundly admired Socrates. Certainly no two other Athenians would have more enjoyed a conversation on ethics. Euripides is said, also, to have been a pupil of Prodicus, and, although this sophist was somewhat younger than the poet, it is altogether possible that he was affected by him, especially by his book "On the proper choice of words." The anecdote which tells of a visit to Egypt by Euripides and Plato is absurd for reasons of chronology, and may have originated from a comparison of similar theories held by the two men concerning the future life.

VIII. Euripides and his collaborators. The tradition which represents Socrates as assisting Euripides in the writing of his plays is based wholly upon jests of the comic poets, who meant merely to indicate personal familiarity between the two men. Aristophanes actually denies (*Frogs* 1491-9) that Socrates ever did anything wholesome, or probably anything at all, for the poetry of Euripides. Plato, also, in the *Phaedo* (60D-61B) seems to deny the alleged collaboration. Mnesilochus, the poet's father-in-law, is said to have helped him with the writing of his plays, but this again may be no more than comic exaggeration. Cephisophon, who, as tradition will have it, lived with Euripides and seduced his wife, seems to have been a gifted young man, who may actually have assisted in training the choruses. Timocrates (or Democrates) of Ar-

gos seems to have been the director of the *Andromache*, when that play was produced outside of Athens, presumably at Argos.

VITA

Sylvester Byron Straw was born in Bellwood, Pennsylvania, October 17, 1913. He attended elementary and secondary school in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and was graduated from the John Harris High School in January 1933. In September of that year he entered Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, from which institution he received the A. B. degree with honor in June 1937. He was accorded the A. M. degree by the University of Illinois in June 1938. He held a graduate scholarship at the University of Illinois for the year 1937-8, and fellowships for the years 1939-40, and 1940-41. During the first semester of the academic year 1938-9 he was employed as instructor in Latin at Alma College, Alma, Michigan. In his graduate work he has studied with Professors W. A. Oldfather, H. V. Canter, B. E. Perry, and J. W. Swain, and Dean M. T. McClure. He is a member of the Wheaton College Scholastic Honor Society, Pi Gamma Mu, and Phi Beta Kappa.

